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Sustainable development and international economic cooperation: implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)

Sustainable development and international economic cooperation: implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)

Proposals on the scope and organizational aspects of the special session of the General Assembly on the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

1. In paragraph 218 of the Habitat Agenda, which was adopted by the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3 to 14 June 1996, the Conference recommended that the General Assembly should consider holding a special session in the year 2001 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of Habitat II and should consider further actions and initiatives. After its consideration of the matter at its fifty-second session, the General Assembly decided, in paragraph 12 of its resolution 52/190 of 18 December 1997, to hold a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2001 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the modalities of which will be decided on at its fifty-third session.

2. The present report has been prepared with a view to assisting the General Assembly in its consideration of the above-mentioned modalities for the special session. It contains, *inter alia*, proposals on (a) the scope and substantive aspects of the special session, (b) the

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organizational aspects of the special session, including the preparatory process, (c) the roles of the Commission on Human Settlements, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in that process, and (d) the involvement of partners and relevant United Nations organizations and agencies in the review and appraisal process.

3. An indicative timetable for the preparatory process for the special session is also annexed hereto.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. In its resolution 51/177 of 16 December 1996 the General Assembly endorsed the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda, which were adopted by the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) on 14 June 1996. In paragraph 13 of the same resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed that the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions, including Assembly resolutions 48/162 of 20 December 1993 and 50/227 of 24 May 1996, together with the Commission on Human Settlements, shall constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism to oversee the coordination of activities for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Subsequently, and pursuant to a recommendation of the Conference, the General Assembly, in paragraph 12 of its resolution 52/190 of 18 December 1997, decided to hold a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2001 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), the modalities of which will be decided on at its fifty-third session.

B. Background: second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and related processes

2. The Conference on Human Settlements at Istanbul brought to a close a remarkable continuum of United Nations conferences held over the last decade of the twentieth century. Focusing on education (1990), children (1991), environment and development (1992), human rights (1993), population (1994), social development (1995), women (1995) and human settlements (1996), this cycle of United Nations conferences elaborated a global agenda for sustainable development and for the work of the United Nations, government and civil society well into the next century.

3. Having the advantage of being held as the closing United Nations conference of the decade, Habitat II had the opportunity of drawing key principles from the deliberations of other conferences and of forging a comprehensive plan of action into concrete commitments and actions at the level where they matter most: the cities, settlements and communities where people work and live.

4. The Conference was also unique in that, drawing lessons and inspiration from the experience of previous United Nations conferences, it was conceived from the very onset as a conference of partnerships.

5. For the first time at a United Nations conference, local authorities and locally elected leaders, parliamentarians, trade union and business leaders, non-governmental organizations, scientists, women and youth groups, professionals and researchers were engaged, not as passive bystanders, but as active participants and full partners. As the Secretary-General pointed out to the world leaders assembled at Istanbul in June 1996, the Conference was the first United Nations Conference to have given, as a part of its official machinery, a platform to representatives of civil society.

6. As a result, the government leaders assembled at Istanbul endorsed this inclusive approach by adopting an enabling strategy based on the three principles of (a) partnerships, (b) participation and (c) decentralization as the most effective approach for realizing the commitments made during the Conference.

7. A comprehensive framework has been set in place to ensure sustainability and cost-effectiveness for the momentum generated at Istanbul. This framework is based on the full mobilization of existing programmes within the United Nations system as well as the resources and initiatives of all Habitat Agenda partners and representatives of civil society.

8. This framework is based on the Habitat Agenda, which contains five strategic objectives to guide its implementation:

(a) Creating partnerships between all the key stakeholders to encourage the cooperation and increase the effectiveness of each partner;

(b) Adopting enabling approaches by national and local authorities to encourage all potential partners to exercise their responsibilities and rights in the development process;

(c) Developing participatory mechanisms to allow all the stakeholders to engage in decision-making processes for improving their living environment;

(d) Building skills, expertise, knowledge and know-how among all the partner groups to enhance the quality of civic engagement, participation and partnerships;

(e) Monitoring and assessing progress through networking among partners utilizing modern information techniques.

9. Working in close partnership with the rest of the United Nations system and partners in civil society, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), in its capacity as focal point for the Habitat II follow-up, issued a series of guides for implementing the Habitat Agenda. These guides are all available on the Habitat website (http://www.unhabitat.org/partners/index.html) and include guides for national committees, civil society organizations, local authorities, the private sector and parliamentarians. Guides on best practices and urban indicators have also been issued, as has an overview paper on monitoring progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda.

10. Member States can therefore count on a powerful process of mobilization of civil society partners at the global, regional, national and local levels. It must be kept in mind, however, that the ultimate responsibility for the successful implementation of the Habitat Agenda rests with Governments. Of particular importance is the support of Member States to developing countries. For this purpose, guidelines for the United Nations Resident Coordinator System on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda have been discussed through the appropriate inter-agency coordination mechanisms, finalized and distributed to all Resident Coordinators in the field.

11. A little over two years after the Habitat II Conference, the stage is set for a concrete, coordinated implementation process of the Habitat Agenda. What is now needed is for this process to be sustained at the highest political level and for the broadest possible effort to be made to build on successes, recognize failures and identify important gaps to move the Habitat Agenda ahead into the next century.

II. Scope and substantive aspects of the special session and its preparatory process

A. Action at the national and local levels

12. As agreed at the Habitat II Conference, Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the Habitat Agenda (para. 213). The overall review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda in the year 2001 (Istanbul + 5) will review progress made at national and local levels and will assess the appropriateness of mechanisms that have been established at national levels to coordinate and support the different activities set up by Governments at the national and local levels in cooperation with partners from civil society. This call for action at the national level was reiterated in General Assembly resolution 51/177 (*inter alia*, paras. 6, 7, 8, 10). The special session should consider ways through which implementation at national and local levels could be further promoted and supported. Apart from assessing the effectiveness of coordinating, supporting and implementing mechanisms, this should include consideration of experience with disseminating and learning from best practices and capacity-building activities at the local government level. Drawing from lessons learnt in implementing Agenda 21 through the setting up of local Agenda 21 initiatives, the special session should also focus its review on implementing the Habitat Agenda through actions at the local level and should make recommendation for future directions.

13. A particular focus of the special session should be on assessing the legal, administrative, financial and human resource constraints to carrying out the national plans of action. Based on progress reports from Governments and its own sources of information, the Commission secretariat would prepare a global analysis of achievements and constraints to serve as a basis for a review by the special session. This would also allow the special session to formulate a report on lessons learnt and to prepare recommendations for future action.

B. Partnership and the role of civil society

14. The broad-based concept of partnership with all actors in civil society has been widely recognized as a key feature of the Habitat Agenda and for making human settlements sustainable in ecological, social and economic terms. The Habitat Agenda calls for partnerships among actors from public, private, voluntary and community-based organizations, the cooperative sector and non-governmental organizations as being essential to the achievement of sustainable human settlements and to the provision of adequate shelter and services for all (goals and principles, para. 33).

15. The special session should review the specific contributions of different partners to implementing the Habitat Agenda at national and local levels. This review should focus particularly on assessing the experiences of local authorities and their global associations, non-governmental organizations and their global and regional bodies, private sector representatives, global habitat parliamentarians, academic institutions, trade unions and community groups. The special session should also consider the effectiveness of partnership arrangements in achieving broad-based participation through the forming of alliances, the pooling of resources, the sharing of knowledge and the

contribution of skills for collective action among partners at national and local levels. Again, the experience with learning from best practices will be a specific aspect of this review.

16. A further focus of the special session will be on the legal status of partners and their international associations in the United Nations system, in particular to assure their participation in the work of the Commission on Human Settlements. This focus on the legal status of partners will take into account the content of resolution 16/12 of the Commission on Human Settlements.

C. Monitoring and assessment

17. The special session will also review the effectiveness of the mechanisms established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Issues that will merit in-depth analysis are the effectiveness of the Commission, its secretariat and partners in providing Member States with an effective and comprehensive process for monitoring and analysis of progress implementing the Habitat Agenda; the effectiveness of the guidelines provided for the same purpose; the effectiveness of indicators and best practices in improving urban policy and decision-making; the effectiveness of the Global Urban Observatory as a medium for increasing the base of knowledge on the shelter and human settlements; and the effectiveness of global research efforts, such as *The Global Report on Human Settlements* and the *State of the World's Cities* report, in raising awareness of human settlements and urban issues.

D. International cooperation

18. International cooperation is a fundamental strategy for implementing the Habitat Agenda, as outlined in chapter IV.F, Implementation and follow-up of the Habitat Agenda. General Assembly resolution 51/177 reiterated the call for international cooperation and invited the United Nations organizations and the specialized agencies to identify specific actions that they will undertake, within their mandates, towards implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Most organizations and agencies of the United Nations system have announced their plans of action for their contribution towards achieving the goals of the Istanbul Conference. The special session should invite these organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, to submit progress reports with an assessment of the impact of their actions in support of the Habitat II themes of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements. This review of international cooperation through the United Nations system should be done in the context of major global issues and trends such as urbanization, decentralization, globalization, capacity-building and partnership. The special session should also review the respective roles of the Economic and Social Council and of the Commission on Human Settlements in the coordination of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

19. In accordance with the special mention of cooperation at the regional level in paragraphs 27 and 28 of General Assembly resolution 51/177, the special session should assess action taken at the regional level and by the regional commissions. This should include the request of the General Assembly to consider convening high-level meetings at regional levels to exchange experiences and adopt appropriate measures in cooperation with regional intergovernmental organizations and regional development banks.

20. Further, the special session should consider the issue of new and additional financial resources needed to implement the Habitat Agenda through international cooperation. To this effect, the Habitat Agenda has identified a wide range of action areas to mobilize additional financial resources at national and international levels (para. 204). In reviewing the issue of additional financial resources and better use of available resources, the special session would formulate pertinent recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of international cooperation.

III. Participation of Habitat Agenda partners

21. The process that led to Habitat II and the decisions taken at Istanbul, as well as the framework that has been described for its follow-up, established the full involvement of the Habitat Agenda partners through the Committee II hearings at the Conference as one of the cornerstones for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. This is recognized in the Habitat Agenda itself, which recommended, in paragraph 240, that all partners of the Habitat Agenda, including local authorities, the private sector and communities, should regularly monitor and evaluate their own performances in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

22. The value of the participation and involvement of the partners, also through dialogue among themselves and with Governments, has also been stressed by the Commission on

Human Settlements in the course of its first substantive review of the outcome of Habitat II in its resolution 16/12. This principle, together with an invitation to Governments to include in their delegations to future sessions of the Commission representatives of local authorities and the relevant actors of civil society, has been reiterated by the General Assembly in its latest resolution on the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), resolution 52/190.

23. It is therefore essential to encourage all Habitat Agenda partners to participate fully in the preparatory process of the special session and at the special session itself.

24. While the rules of procedure of the General Assembly do not allow for the active participation of representatives of major groups in its major deliberations, mechanisms can be identified to allow for a substantive and recognized contribution to and participation in the special session and its preparatory process by Habitat Agenda partners in their distinctive roles and areas of responsibility.

25. The General Assembly may wish to consider adopting the procedures followed by the Preparatory Committee of Habitat II in its work leading to the Conference. As to the special session itself, the General Assembly may also wish to avail itself of the formula of "partners hearings", as employed by Committee II of the Habitat II Conference. Through such a formula, the partners, as identified by the Habitat Agenda, will have an effective opportunity to review their commitments and plans of action under the Habitat Agenda.

IV. Organizational aspects of the preparatory process

26. The preparatory process for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda will be carried out at the local, national, regional and global levels. At the local, national and regional levels the organizational arrangements that were successfully and effectively utilized for the preparations for the Habitat II Conference at Istanbul will be refined and adapted to the requirements of the special session, with special emphasis on the inputs and participation of local authorities and other partners from civil society.

27. With regard to the preparatory activities at the global level, the Secretary-General recommends to the General Assembly that it invite the Commission on Human Settlements, meeting in special and additional sessions, to serve as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly. This recommendation is based on three important considerations. First, the Commission on Human Settlements is the intergovernmental body entrusted by the General Assembly with the overall responsibility of monitoring progress in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda; secondly, this would allow for maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness in guiding the preparatory process for the special session; and, thirdly, this would be in line with the preparatory arrangements for the special session on Agenda 21 in which the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/113 of 20 December 1995, invited the Commission on Sustainable Development to devote its Ad Hoc Open-ended Inter-sessional Working Group Meeting to assist the Commission in undertaking the review for the special session. This arrangement enabled the Commission on Sustainable Development, during its regular sessions, to continue with its mandated work throughout the preparatory period for the special session on Agenda 21.

28. The request for special and additional sessions is justified by the fact that the Commission on Human Settlements meets every two years and its next two sessions (in 1999 and 2001) are expected to have a heavy and full agenda focusing on the ongoing implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the local, national, regional and global levels, including the role of the local authorities and civic society, and the coordination of the relevant organizations and agencies of the United Nations in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The Commission has also to consider and adopt the programmes of work and programme budgets of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) for the biennium 2000–2001 at its seventeenth session (1999) and for the biennium 2002–2003 at its eighteenth session (2001). It would thus be too much to expect it to devote enough time, at its regular sessions in 1999 and 2001, to the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly.

29. When serving as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Settlements would of course be open to the participation of all States Members of the United Nations, Habitat Agenda partners and members of the specialized agencies, also all representatives of funds and programmes, with the participation of accredited observers in accordance with the rules of procedure to be prepared by the preparatory committee itself. Accordingly, at its organizational session, which would be held for two working days and back-to-back with its forthcoming seventeenth (regular) session (Nairobi, 5–14 May 1999), the Commission, meeting as the

preparatory committee, would adopt appropriate rules of procedure reflecting its enlarged membership, specialized status and new mandate. It would, at the same organizational session, also elect its officers for the duration of the preparatory process and consider the organization of work for its first and second substantive sessions.

30. With regard to the substantive sessions of the preparatory committee, it is recommended that the first substantive session be held for five working days in April–May 2000, to consider, *inter alia*, (a) the recommendations of the Commission on Human Settlements at its seventeenth (regular) session on the issues referred to in paragraph 34 below; (b) the report of the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council referred to in section VI below; (c) the role of partners and relevant United Nations organizations and agencies in the review and appraisal process; (d) the rules of procedure for the special session of the General Assembly; (e) the provisional agenda and organizational arrangements for the special session of the General Assembly; (f) local, national and regional preparations and (g) any other issues that may be referred to it by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

31. In the interest of making the preparatory process efficient and cost-effective, it is recommended that the second substantive session of the preparatory committee be held for five working days in February 2001, back-to-back with the eighteenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements, which would also be held for five working days immediately before the preparatory committee. During this second session, the preparatory committee would consider, *inter alia*, (a) the report of the Commission on Human Settlements at its eighteenth (regular) session; (b) the reports from the regional meetings; (c) preparation of a first draft of the global review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda for submission to the special session of the General Assembly; and (d) finalization of the provisional agenda and organizational arrangements, including the rules of procedure, for the special session of the General Assembly.

V. Role of the Commission on Human Settlements during its regular sessions

32. The original mandate and terms of reference of the Commission on Human Settlements, as contained in General Assembly resolution 32/162 of 19 December 1977, were revised and enhanced by the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to enable it to discharge its responsibilities and challenges with respect to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

33. Among the functions and responsibilities that were given to the Commission were provisions that it should promote the full and effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the local, national, regional and international levels through, *inter alia*, the analysis of relevant inputs from Governments, local authorities, the United Nations system, relevant non-governmental organizations and the private sector and that it should propose, when appropriate, ways and means by which the overall policy objectives and goals of the Habitat Agenda might best be achieved. The Commission is also to evaluate the obstacles encountered in achieving the goals of the Habitat Agenda and to recommend appropriate measures and alternative actions as deemed necessary to enhance the dynamic nature of the Habitat Agenda (see para. 222 (b), (h), (j) and (n) of the Agenda). Subsequently, the General Assembly, in paragraph 1 of its resolution 52/192 of 18 December 1997, reaffirmed that the Commission on Human Settlements, as a standing committee of the Economic and Social Council, should have a central role in monitoring, within the United Nations system, the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and advising the Council thereon, and further decided, in paragraph 9 of the same resolution, that the Commission, in fulfilling its mandate, should assist the Economic and Social Council in monitoring, reviewing and assessing the progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, *inter alia*, through the analysis of relevant inputs from Governments, local authorities and their associations, relevant non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

34. In view of the above, the General Assembly may wish to recommend to the Commission on Human Settlements that, at its seventeenth session (Nairobi, 5–14 May 1999), it includes in its agenda an item entitled "Preparations for the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda", under which the Commission would consider and recommend to the General Assembly, at its fifty-fourth session, through the Economic and Social Council:

(a) The provisional agenda for the first substantive session of the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda;

(b) The scope to be covered by the review and appraisal and, consequently, the substantive documents to

be prepared by the secretariat for the first substantive session of the preparatory committee;

(c) The issues to be addressed by the high-level segment of an Economic and Social Council session on human settlements issues to be held before the year 2001, as recommended by the General Assembly in paragraph 16 of its resolution 51/177, and paragraph 13 of its resolution 52/190;

(d) The issues to be addressed by the Commission on Human Settlements at its eighteenth session, which would be supportive of the work being done by the preparatory committee.

VI. Role of the Economic and Social Council

35. In its resolution 51/177, the General Assembly reaffirmed that the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Settlements should constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism to oversee the coordination of activities for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and, in this regard, invited the Council to consider dedicating one high-level segment before the year 2001 to human settlements and the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. In the same resolution, the General Assembly also emphasized that the Economic and Social Council should promote subregional and regional cooperation in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, that the regional commissions, within their mandates and in cooperation with regional intergovernmental organizations and banks, could consider convening high-level meetings to review progress made in implementing the outcome of Habitat II and that the regional commissions should report to the Council on the outcome of such meetings.

36. In pursuance of the above, the General Assembly may wish to invite the Economic and Social Council to hold the high-level segment proposed in paragraph 13 of resolution 51/177 in the year 1999 to address the issues identified by the Commission on Human Settlements at its seventeenth session (see para. 34 (c) above). This will enable the Council to provide its substantive input into the special session of the General Assembly. During the high-level segment the Council would also address the issues raised in paragraph 28 of General Assembly resolution 51/177, especially the role of regional commissions and other relevant United Nations organizations in the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the regional and subregional levels. This will also enable the Council to play its coordinating and pivotal role among the relevant United Nations bodies and organizations with respect to the review and appraisal process.

VII. Organizational aspects of the special session

37. Drawing on experience from previous special sessions of the General Assembly and of other major conferences organized in recent years under the auspices of the United Nations, including the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, it is recommended that the special session be held in June 2001 for a period of five working days, a time-frame that will accommodate the statements of the representatives of all Member States and will allow for interaction with United Nations agencies and the representatives of Habitat Agenda partners.

38. If the need arises, the General Assembly could allocate some time for a one-day consultative meeting before the session. Among the issues which could be finalized during such a meeting would be organizational matters for the session, including the composition of the bureau of the special session.

39. It is recommended that participation of Member States and the United Nations system be at the highest level and that provision be made for an adequate and effective participation of representatives of local authorities, Habitat Agenda partners and organizations from civil society.

40. It is further recommended that detailed arrangements for the organizational and substantive aspects of the special session be considered by the preparatory committee for submission to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

41. An indicative timetable for the preparatory process for the special session is attached for ease of reference.

Annex

Indicative timetable for the preparatory process for the special session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Month Year	*Meeting*	*Actions*
September–December 1998	General Assembly, Fifty-third session	To consider the report of the Secretary-General on the scope and organizational arrangements for the preparatory process and for the special session itself
May 1999 (2 days back-to-back with the seventeenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements/17)	Organizational session of the Preparatory Committee (Special session of the Commission on Human Settlements)	Election of officers of the Preparatory Committee Consideration and adoption of its rules of procedure Organization of work of the first and second substantive sessions of the Preparatory Committee
5–14 May 1999	Seventeenth (regular) session of the Commission on Human Settlements	In addition to its regular work, to also consider and recommend to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly – the provisional agenda for the first substantive session of the Preparatory Committee for the overall review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda in the year 2001 (Istanbul + 5); – the scope to be covered by the review and appraisal and, consequently, the substantive documents to be prepared by the secretariat for the Preparatory Committee I; – the issues to be addressed by the high-level segment of an ECOSOC session on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, which is to be held before the year 2001, as recommended by the General Assembly; – the linkage between the proposed high-level segment of an ECOSOC session and Istanbul + 5.

Month Year	*Meeting*	*Actions*
		– the issues to be addressed by the Commission at its eighteenth session in the year 2000, which would be supportive of the work being done by the Preparatory Committee
July 1999	High-level segment of the Economic and Social Council on human settlements issues	To provide guidance to and coordination of the United Nations system in the preparatory process
September–December 1999	General Assembly: Fifty-fifth session	Considers the report of the seventeenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements and the report of the Preparatory Committee at its organizational session Consideration of the report of the high-level segment of ECOSOC
April–May 2000 (5 days)	First substantive session of the Preparatory Committee (First special session of the Commission on Human Settlements)	Consideration of the report of the seventeenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements; Consideration of the report of the high-level segment of ECOSOC; Consideration of the role of Habitat Agenda partners and United Nations organizations in the review and appraisal process; Consideration of the preparations at the local, national and regional levels; Consideration of the rules of procedure of Istanbul + 5; Consideration of the provisional agenda and organizational arrangements for Istanbul + 5
First half of the Year 2000	Regional preparatory meetings	Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the regional level